

British Coalition for ET at UN Decolonization

Statement by the British Coalition for East Timor to the U.N. Decolonization Committee

New York, 13 July 1994

Mr Chairman and Honourable Members,

Since the Santa Cruz massacre in 1991, the issue of East Timor has reestablished itself firmly on the international agenda. This fact has been reflected in new diplomatic initiatives. In January this year Franscesc Vendrell, the Secretary-General's Director of Political Affairs, and Tamrat Samuel visited Lisbon, Jakarta and East Timor. In Jakarta they visited Xanana Gusmao in prison; In East Timor they had discussions with Bishop Belo and other East Timorese. For the first time the Secretary-General's mandate from the 1982 General Assembly resolution 37/30 to 'consult with all parties directly concerned' was being put into practice. After their May talks the Foreign Ministers of Portugal and Indonesia informed the Secretary-General of their readiness to meet leading East Timorese supporters and opponents of integration respectively, a potentially ground-breaking initiative.

It is then, sad to note that in Paris last Friday (July 8), the donor nations that make up the Consultative Group on Indonesia (CGI) yet again decided to increase aid to Indonesia for the next year to a record \$5.2 billion. This is surely the most explicit evidence of western nations' double standards - expressing hope that Indonesia's record on human rights will improve while doing nothing that might actually pressurise Jakarta to change its ways.

The record of the British government is particularly shameful. Following the showing of John Pilger's documentary *Death of a Nation: The Timor Conspiracy* there has been a massive upsurge both in press coverage and in popular concern for East Timor. The British Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) however, remains unmoved by public opinion and continues to give identical stock answers to the questions of MPs and general public alike. Instead it prefers to propagate Indonesian falsehoods such as the 'refutation' of evidence of a second massacre on 12 November 1992 at the Wira Husada Military Hospital by 'one of East Timor's most prominent priests'. This priest was Marcus Wanandi, an Indonesian assigned to 'assist' Bishop Belo. One of Wanandi's brothers is the business partner of President Suharto's daughter in 'tourist development' in East Timor; the other, Jusuf Wanandi, was a BAKIN agent whose role in Operasi Komodo, the plan to integrate East Timor, was to drum up diplomatic support in the United States and Western Europe. Bishop Belo has since affirmed that the second massacre did take place.

Although the FCO is always 'grateful for their interest', members of the British public apparently make 'a mistake to confuse past history with today's realities'; and are 'wrong to suggest that widespread abuses of human rights persist in East Timor'. The FCO is 'encouraging Indonesia to live up to its human rights obligations'. There is much evidence to the contrary. Last June, FCO officials fostered the impression that the government was pushing for International Red Cross access to political prisoners. A 'restricted access' telex from the British Embassy in Jakarta stated the opposite, that external pressure would contribute little. An internal memo described letters in response to questions on the subject as 'for stonewalling'.

The FCO's main energy has been devoted to defending 'its own clear policy on arms sales to Indonesia' especially concerning the sale of Hawk jetfighters worth 500 million, finally confirmed last June after months of denials. This policy is based on the right to self-defence under article 51 of the United Nations Charter. 'This is a right we claim for ourselves and it would be inconsistent and discriminatory to deny it to others'. Actually the British government denies that right to Bosnia. There is no conceivable threat to Indonesia from any of her neighbours. The expansionist power in the region is Indonesia. In the early sixties Jakarta's policy of konfrontasi posed a very real threat to Malaysia's sovereignty; in 1963 Indonesia occupied West Papua, and in 1975 of course, invaded East Timor. Supplying Indonesia with arms stokes a regional arms race, irrespective of the moral and legal considerations. The FCO's 'own clear policy' also undermines initiatives such as that last August by the United States government to block the sale of F-5E jetfighters from Jordan. Indonesian generals simply said that they would buy from Britain or France instead, having already ruled out buying from Russia.

The FCO has moreover a whole arsenal of secondary justifications for the sales. It says it has an assurance that the Hawks will not be used against civilians - in 1984 it said that it did 'not normally seek assurances which can offer no reliable guarantee about the uses to which the equipment might later be put'. The

shadow Foreign Affairs spokesperson wrote to Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd on 28 October 1993 to spell out just what those assurances were. He has still not received a reply.

The FCO says that 'the government would not licence for any export any defence equipment likely to be used for internal repression'. Other ministries admit though that the siting of equipment is a matter for the purchasing country and that it is not practical to monitor their use once it has reached its destination. The FCO says that the Hawks that Indonesia has and is purchasing are trainers. This contradicts Airforce Chief of Staff Marshall Sukardi's announcement in January 1985 that Hawks delivered in the early eighties were serving in the new airforce 'for purposes of advanced training and tactical combat'. Similarly Indonesia's Minister of Research and Technology, Dr Habibie, said on 17 April 1994 that the new Hawks 'will be used not only to train pilots but also for ground attack'. The FCO's assertions of the impossibility of converting the trainer version of the Hawk to the full ground attack version are blatantly contradicted by British Aerospace's promotional literature.

These are just so much more 'stonewalling'. The British Coalition for East Timor's concern is not about the particular use of any individual item, but rather the 'seal of approval' that our government gives to the Indonesian armed forces (ABRI). Despite its role in the genocide of the East Timorese people, the British government effectively says that ABRI are responsible and trustworthy. Eye-witness testimony of East Timorese about the use of Hawks in the bombing campaigns in the east of the island during the mid-eighties is dismissed out of hand as 'not cast-iron'; Indonesian propaganda is accepted at face-value. 'I think those making such allegations would have to do a bit better. We've said that we are ready to consider hard evidence that Hawks are being used for repressive purposes in East Timor, but no-one has come up with any,' says Junior FCO Minister Alistair Goodlad. The FCO will not though give a categorical assurance that Hawks have not been used in East Timor.

Mr Goodlad also claims that Indonesia is reducing its troop levels to the average strength for a small province (a claim that Indonesia seems to make every year). However this is not borne out by the report of the British military attache who visited East Timor last November whose 'hard evidence' reveals a very different side of East Timor than that passed on to members of the public (The report was headed 'Confidential... not, repeat not, intended for use in the press'). He asked the local commander in Dili, Colonel Lumintang, about Indonesian military strength in East Timor. The commander eventually admitted the presence of ten battalions which are rotated every nine months. He gave no timetable for withdrawal but hoped to 'have it all under control in 1995' with only 'indigenous battalions' left. Of his meeting with East Timor's deputy governor the military attache remarked: 'The lasting impression was of petty provincial bureaucracy devoting more effort to the production of statistics than the administration of the province'.

Along with officials from other embassies, the British military attache insisted on visiting the Santa Cruz cemetery. '[We] were keen to judge whether the shootings there two years previously might have taken place because the area was restricted with no exits along which the demonstrators could have been dispersed. [We] observed that there were at least four exits and that the cemetery walls were not high... This physical layout should have allowed well-trained troops to disperse a demonstration with little bloodshed'. [source: John Pilger, New Statesman, 3 June 1994]

Britain's diplomatic tolerance of Indonesia over East Timor dates back to the events surrounding the invasion. In July 1975 the British Ambassador in Jakarta suggested that London lie low and 'avoid siding against the government' as it was 'in Britain's interest that Indonesia should absorb the territory as soon and as unobtrusively as possible'. By 1985 Indonesia had become the biggest recipient of British aid outside the Commonwealth. Since 1991 diplomatic activity has stepped up dramatically with numerous ministerial visits and trade missions - aid, mainly in the form of Aid and Trade Provision projects, has been lavished on Jakarta. On 7 April 1994 Alistair Goodlad announced a 'soft loan' of 80 million, a large part of which will cover spending on telecommunications. It is no coincidence that the companies providing this 'aid' are the same companies supplying the Indonesian military with communications, radar and electronic equipment. This follows last year's 65 million 'soft loan' agreed by Douglas Hurd for a power-generating plant in Kalimantan, where British mining companies have substantial interests. Not only are such agreements tied to British trade, they are typically channelled towards top-down infrastructural development projects which benefit large scale British investment projects, rather than encouraging development by local people.

This 'conditionality' is a long way from the conditionality that Douglas Hurd was espousing in 1990 and 1991:

'Countries tending towards pluralism, public accountability, respect for the rule of law, human rights and market principles should be encouraged. Those who persist with repressive policies or corrupt management... should not expect us to support their folly with scarce aid resources which could be better used elsewhere.' [Speech at Overseas Development Institute, 6 June 1991]

By August 1991, this view had crystallised into three principles of good governance that Douglas Hurd suggested should be applied to the EC budget:

1. Respect for human rights and the rule of law
2. Pursuit of sound economic and social policies
3. Competence and accountability of government institutions

Even at that time aid agencies suggested that small and unimportant countries would be made an example of, while the transgressions of larger states such as Indonesia would continue to be overlooked. Their predictions proved correct. Conditionality of aid has since been ditched, luckily for Indonesia, since it would not pass any of the above principles. The Santa Cruz massacre and the resulting trials of both soldiers and demonstrators clearly demonstrated the Indonesian regime's total lack of respect for human rights and the rule of law, as if there did not already exist ample evidence of that throughout the Indonesian archipelago. The recent banning of the only free trade union is yet another nail in the coffin of Indonesia's 'sound economic and social policies'.

The centrepiece of Indonesian government's policy of openness, *keperbukaan*, is supposedly the 'free' media. The revoking of the licences last month of three magazines and threats to numerous others because they published unpalatable truths merely confirms the pattern of contradiction between the government's stated policies and its actions. 'Is the government so weak that a few articles can shake government stability?' asked Aristides Katappo who himself had been previously banned. Interviewed last month in one of the last editions of *Editor*, the courageous academic George Aditjondro articulated another unpalatable truth: 'The issue of East Timor has been maintained since 1975 at the UN, meaning that it is very durable. Just as durable as the question of Palestine. This is really a problem.' More and more Indonesians are beginning to grasp this - in Jakarta leading human rights activists Haji Princen, Adnan Buyung Nasution and Hendardi, all told Vendrell's mission that East Timor's self-determination is integral to the human rights situation there.

Mr Chairman,

The Indonesian government has said that it wants dialogue, but it has imprisoned Xanana Gusmão, lied about his supposed appeal for clemency, is attempting to split the Timorese resistance abroad, persecutes those Indonesians who dare to speak the truth about East Timor, and commits yet more human rights abuses as it continues its genocidal occupation in breach of eight General Assembly resolutions and two Security Council resolutions.

Finally the British Coalition suggests that the members of the Indonesian delegation ask themselves what Indonesia has to fear of an independent East Timor? The words of a statement to the Indonesian Bishops' Council on 10 November 1974, of which George Aditjondro was one of its authors, still have an uncanny resonance today:

'If people think that the independence of Portuguese Timor would represent a threat to the existence of the Republic of Indonesia, then it is obvious that something is not right in our Republic.'

Thank you.